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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4447
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2259
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2124
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2695
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001421

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN/ROMANIA: RELATIONS ARE GOOD, BUT NOT WITHOUT CHALLENGES

REF: ASHGABAT 0955

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: According to the Romanian Charge, relations between his country and Turkmenistan are fairly good. Nevertheless, there are several areas of concern, including Turkmenistan's request that Romania convince EU member states not to be so critical of Turkmenistan's human rights record. He also offered that one reason the Turkmen have made little progress regarding political reform is because the Turkmen leadership are afraid of change in that area. END SUMMARY.

RELATIONS ARE GOOD BUT NOT WITHOUT CHALLENGES

¶2. (C) Relations between Turkmenistan and Romania are good, but not without challenges, Romanian Charge Toyan Bordianu recently told us. He said President Berdimuhamedov's July 2008 visit to Romania was very positive. The two countries signed five documents -- a treaty on economic cooperation and the formation of an economic council on technical cooperation, a treaty on double taxation, an agreement on expanding investment and on joint exploration of the Caspian shelf, a memorandum on consultation between the two foreign ministries, and an agreement on educational exchanges. Bordianu noted that the first 20 Turkmen students to study in Romania started their programs in early October. The Turkmen also gave Romania land in the Avaza tourist zone to build a resort.

¶3. (C) Nevertheless, there are several problem areas in the relationship. For example, Turkmenistan has given the Romanians permission to do exploration in one of the blocks in the disputed area of the Caspian. Bordianu said this poses a problem since Romania has good relations with Azerbaijan and does not want to jeopardize them. Another area of irritation has been the difficulty in pinning down a date for a visit by the President of Romania to Turkmenistan. They had proposed December, but that conflicted with the Turkmenistan parliamentary elections. Then, March-April was proposed, but weeks went by without even a response to the diplomatic note. The embassy finally resent the note, proposing January or February.

¶4. (C) Another problem area in the relationship is human

rights. The Turkmen asked for Romania's help with the EU and EU members, so that the Europeans do not judge them so harshly and stop being critical about Turkmenistan's human rights record. The Romanians responded that they would try to be helpful in certain areas, but cannot carry their water with the EU.

NABUCCO

15. (C) Bordianu said Romania supports Nabucco and would be happy if a trans-Caspian pipeline is joined to Nabucco. Nevertheless, he agreed with the Turkmen that stability and security are necessary for energy cooperation to work.

VIEWS ON POLITICAL/ECONOMIC REFORMS

16. (C) Bordianu offered his view of the political and economic situation in the country. He said political reform has not moved forward, because the Turkmen leadership is afraid of making real change in that area. Economic reforms have been difficult, because the country does not use market economic principles. Light industry constitutes a small proportion of the economy. He said the textile industry is not significant. The economy is based 85-90% on oil and gas.

17. (C) Bordianu decried drug trafficking in the country. He alleged that there are some officials that work with and protect drug traffickers, which is why narcotics are so prevalent. He also claimed that there is a factory in Turkmenbashi that produces precursors.

ASHGABAT 00001421 002 OF 002

REGIONAL WATER ISSUES

18. (C) The EU named Romania the head of the Caucasus/Central Asia group for water within the framework of the EU. Bordianu said this process has produced lots of activities, but no follow-up.

19. (C) COMMENT: The Turkmen may think that the key to improving relations with the EU is finding someone who can plead their case, like Romania. This, however, is not a simple case of public relations. Continuing to take concrete steps to improve the human rights situation as well as building strong bilateral economic/commercial ties with the various EU members will have a much stronger impact. END COMMENT.
CURRAN